

NSC BRIEFING

25X1 10 December 1959

CAMBODIA-THAILAND-LAO

- I. Cambodia facing growing threat of Communist subversion. Weaknesses due largely to quixotic, one-man rule of Prince Sihanouk.

A. Sihanouk has unilaterally concluded political and economic agreements with Sino-Soviet bloc over past two years.

B. ChiCom embassy now in Phnom Penh, after diplomatic relations established last July. Peiping has fine opportunity for meeting new inroads among 300,000 Overseas Chinese. (Soviets, Poles, and Czechs also have ^{represented} embassies in Phnom Penh.)

C. Buddhist clergy and Vietnamese minorities and Cambodian youth also important targets. Communies have penetrated educational system.

D. Cambodian-language radio broadcasts, movies, literature, etc., used by Communies expand influence.

- II. Developing Commie economic aid programs and trade ventures are long-range threats of major significance.

A. Bloc aid consists of \$28 million pledged by ChiComs plus other amounts from rest of bloc. (US has extended \$150 million since 1955; current annual contribution has dropped to \$30 million.)

- III. Frequent government shakeups under Sihanouk's erratic leadership precludes strong administration needed for effective counteraction.

- IV. Sihanouk still firmly in saddle with no immediate prospects of eclipse.

A. Threat of coup by rightist elements considered remote.

B. Dissatisfaction in official circles no serious threat as yet.

C. Sihanouk retains loyalty of masses and enjoys total prerogatives.

V. Sihanouk's recent decision (25 November) to break diplomatic relations with Thailand is example of his unpredictable nature. Action has precipitated Thai-Cambodian crisis.

A. Evidence indicates Sihanouk's move stemmed solely from sudden anger over Thai press articles which, though critical, seemed relatively mild in tone.

VI. This action came at time when Marshal Sarit, himself dictatorial and inclined to spur-of-the-moment decisions, was being threatened by rising factionalism among politically ambitious subordinates.

A. Sarit seized on Cambodian "insult" to unify his followers.

B. Sarit has made strong, probably unacceptable demands on Cambodians and both countries informally circulating charges publicly and at UN.

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VII. Peiping sympathetic to Cambodia's side of story

A. Cambodia may eventually turn to Communist China for support, as it did last summer in squabble with South Vietnam.

1. Sihanouk would seek Peiping's support in hope of maintaining his neutralist position in Southeast Asia.

VIII. In Laos, parliamentary government seems to be falling apart.

A. Pro-West Premier Phoui, fearing he cannot long depend on his slim majority in National Assembly, believes army coup is best solution for effective, anti-Communist government.